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WAR-TIME NERVES

HERBERT J. HALL

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Books by Herbert J. Hall, M. D.

WAR-TIME NERVES
THE UNTROUBLED MIND
MOONRISE—A BOOK OF POEMS

WAR-TIME NERVES

WAR-TIME NERVES

BY

HERBERT J. HALL, M.D.



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*Master of Masters,
O maker of heroes,
Thunder the brave,
Irresistible message :
"Life is worth Living
Through every grain of it,
From the foundations
To the last edge
Of the cornerstone, death."*

W. E. HENLEY

NOTE

THESE papers made their first appearance in the *Bellman* and are now published in book form with the permission of the editor.

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I

WAR-TIME NERVES

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of doubting,
For mist and the blowing of winds and the mouthing of words he
scorns;
Not the sinuous speech of schools he hears, but a knightly
shouting,
And never comes darkness down, yet he greeteth a million
morns.

He whom a dream hath possessed knoweth no more of roaming;
All roads and the flowing of waves and the speediest flight he
knows,
But wherever his feet are set, his soul is forever homing,
And going, he comes, and coming, he heareth a call and goes.

SHAEMAS O SHEEL

WHAT is the war doing to the mind and heart;
to the nerves of the Nation? I can answer
only as one obliged to stay at home and who
looks out from an obscure corner upon the
great world conflict. It is possible that such a
viewpoint may have its own special value and
interest.

A boy of nineteen goes into aviation because
he likes it and "because it does not matter if
a few boys are killed off in practice — that will

leave the older men for their larger work." This is not fatalism, it is not the discouraged cry of a man tired of life, neither is it patriotism in the narrow sense. It is good-will, good sportsmanship, the new nerve of the Nation. It is more still. These boys, many of them sons of rich men, are accustomed to luxury and comfort — too much accustomed. They are deliberately and in great numbers choosing danger, privation, and death as something better than what they were having. Why? Not entirely from love of the game, we may be sure, although that element is strong.

The individual and the war, or in relation to the war, offers a most absorbing study. How do men go into it and why, and what is the reaction upon those who stay at home? This much is sure: those who go and all of us who are affected are simplifying life, not complicating it any more. We shall all know ourselves better, we shall understand better why we do anything, and we are more likely to be direct and effective in every way.

When a man denies himself all he has held valuable and presents himself naked, so to speak, before the great god of war, more than he probably knows has happened. I am not going to idealize and imagine character changes which are not true. Every man will approach his service from a different angle and the personal result will be different in each individual. But with the eyes of the physician I have seen into the lives of a number of men who have enlisted or who have been drafted, who have come back from service or who are waiting to go. I have also studied somewhat the lives of people who stay at home. It is all, or mostly all, good; and the greatest change is in simplification and a new idealism. We no longer need so many things to make us happy. There is in the air a sense of relief even in the face of dread and danger. But simplification in itself would not be so valuable if it did not leave room for and make possible certain great positive virtues.

War, even to those at home, is such an all-

pervading, penetrating matter. It gets into the most sluggish blood, it activates the most torpid brain, it makes men alive, it makes them think. They think not in petty detail any more, but in large directness. They think of war, yes, and how to win it; but they think also of life. When life is so cheap it somehow becomes more interesting, demands explanations and understandings which we have been too indolent or too confused to make.

I am not forgetting my medical viewpoint, but medicine is enlarging its borders. Medical men are permitted to think of vital things nowadays, for it has become evident that matters of philosophy and of religion have their direct influence upon the body. It has also become evident that there is a hygiene of the spirit quite as important as that of the body.

We do not talk about it much at home, the men who are going into service do not talk about it; but out of this great simplification is coming a new strength and directness of religious belief — a new vision. The boy who

sails on a collier or a destroyer, who sees the world and its distant ports, who stands his watch in the early morning when the sea changes from black to gray and from gray to blue, is seeing and learning something besides navigation and geography, is spying for something bigger than the periscope of the lurking submarine. He is accepting cold and danger, he is leaving behind all the absorbing diversity of city life for a purpose greater even than war. He is coming face to face with himself, and he finds that self alone and unsupported before the great mystery, the mystery of life and death. Shall we not call it the mystery of God? The boy has his duties to perform, but they are simple, straightforward; drill and routine have made them almost mechanical. The one thing that is real is the great mystery. "Why am I here?" he asks himself; "what about the morning and the evening with their wonder of sky and sea? What does it mean?" We cannot answer these age-old questions. The boy alone with the sea cannot answer them;

but by the very simplification of his life, by the elimination of all else, he will be nearer to an adequate answer. He will answer partially and in his own way by his life, which will be broader and bigger, by his spirit, which will be richer and more generous.

Perhaps the boy will realize that the creeds and philosophies are far from sufficient to meet the growing needs of his spirit. The greatness of the questions will bring to him a sense of their importance. He may see that he must make some tentative answer; that he must say in effect, "I do not know. But by the very wonder and beauty of life I know that there is something behind it, some vital being into whose hands I commend my spirit." And then there may come a sense of nearness to the God of the sea, the God so much greater than battles, so much greater than human life, so much greater than the roar of guns and the clash of angry steel. Nearness and glad dependence, that is enough — that is religion — that is the great simplification, the great good

experience that the war may bring to the individual, to the boy alone under the stars.

If something like this conception comes to the soldier and the stay-at-home, we shall leave behind us much that has made life cheap and mean and purposeless. There will be a new nervous health, a new quality of manhood that will be the source of finer and more beautiful life upon the earth.

I am going to borrow now part of Lord Dunsany's preface to "The Last Book of Wonder"—these are the words of a man who has seen actual warfare and who finds something good in it:—

"I do not know where I may be when this preface is read. As I write it in August, 1916, I am at Ebrington Barracks, Londonderry, recovering from a slight wound. But it does not matter greatly where I am; my dreams are here before you amongst the following pages; and writing in a day when life is cheap, dreams seem to me all the dearer, the only things that survive.

“Just now the civilization of Europe seems almost to have ceased, and nothing seems to grow in her torn fields but death, yet this is only for a while and dreams will come back again and bloom as of old, all the more radiantly for this terrible ploughing, as the flowers will bloom again where the trenches are and the primroses shelter in shell holes for many seasons, when weeping Liberty has come home to Flanders.

.

“And now I will write nothing further about war, but offer you these books of dreams from Europe as one throws things of value, if only to one’s self, at the last moment out of a burning house.”

II

A CHANGE OF SYSTEM

"Sir," I said one evening to Doctor Sangrado, "I call Heaven to witness on the spot, that I have never saved a patient, one would think they died out of spite." . . . "If you will take a hint, sir," replied I, "we had better change our system."

Gil Blas

THE war holds tremendous possibilities for the men and women who are available for service or who can work at home in some useful capacity. I want to say a word, not so much for those who are actually sick and disabled, as for those who for some more or less obscure reason cannot keep up with the procession of life. In these days of accomplishment there is a sharpened and painful contrast between the active and the passive, the effective and the ineffective. The so-called nervous invalid or the constitutionally feeble find that the war, far from simplifying, actually complicates existence. They cannot understand why they are unequal to the emergency.

The medical department is weeding out of the service man after man who is apparently well, but who, according to test and in the light of previous personal history, does not measure quite up to the physical or nervous standard. I know a young woman who wants to go abroad to work among the poor and the refugees. She has spirit enough, a wise head and a warm heart, but she lacks physical and nervous stamina. She ought rather to stay at home under medical treatment until her body is the best that it can be. She will surely find some smaller but useful work to do here. Shall we call her a failure; shall she call herself a failure? Her situation is typical of hundreds who are failing in the ordinary sense of large accomplishment.

Unquestionably it is the business of such people to use every known means for full recovery. They will find the medical profession ready and eager to help them. But medicine has its great limitations; often enough it is impossible to restore full power. Then we

must not depend upon medical treatment of the usual sort. When drugs and surgery, rest and hygiene, have done their utmost and have failed, it is time for a change of system. It is time for the cure of readjustment and of new understanding.

As a physician I have had my share of difficulty with physical defects and deficiencies, and with those nameless conditions of the body which defy medical aid for years. But I am optimistic because I know that a very real cure is almost always possible even though some of the physical limitations remain. By this cure I mean a readjustment of life; an adaptation to limitations which brings balance and the greatest possible degree of physical efficiency. I say to my discouraged and doubtful patient, "Success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by what you are." If you are the brave, generous soul you ought to be, accomplishment is a secondary matter; it may be expressed in terms of character and of social relationship as well as in terms of

work. Without character behind it, even work is barren and will ultimately fail. With character, material accomplishment will inevitably follow as far as strength will allow. In any event, the value will be there; you yourself are part of the world's treasure. The successful man, the essentially well man, is the one who has done the best he can with his equipment.

It is never wise or fair to compare the work of individuals, for we can rarely, if ever, know just what material there was to start with — to work with. Yet a great deal of discontent and unhappiness come from such comparisons. The girl who cannot go to France is likely to be unhappy, and so, nervously as well as physically ill, if she does not see that here in America the loyalty and patience and courage for which she stands may have their immense value, may help win the war really — for there are plenty of people to accomplish the actual service if they are backed by the character and the enthusiasm, the whole-hearted support, of those who stay at home.

Such a cure is, of course, not so easy as it sounds. The sense of failure is a heavy weight not to be shaken off and disposed of with a few fine phrases. Yet there is a cure for apparent failure. It is the realization of the fact that many, many times there has really been no actual failure, but only an inability to reach preconceived ideals. There is no comfort here for the insincere, for the essentially ineffective. To do their best with what they have to work with is the business of brave souls struggling against odds in a stern and darkened world. But since there is no absolute standard of accomplishment, but only a requirement of quality, there need be no despair in the hearts of those who are ill or poorly endowed.

Here, then, is a kind of medicine, a new system, that does not pretend to cure what cannot be cured, but which turns failure into success and apparent defeat into victory. We must not neglect the body; there are remedies to cure many of its ills. But when these remedies fail there is a medicine of the spirit —

more potent, more desperately needed than any salt or tincture known to man.

When a man is sick, unable to meet the ordinary requirements of life, and yet has no evident or organic physical illness, we say he has nervous prostration. We are apt to shrug our shoulders when we speak of this affliction because we associate it with certain feeble and fussy women who have been known on occasion to pick up their skirts and run as fast as any one. More often than not, such a judgment is unjust, wholly unfair to the idler who might perhaps for a short spurt do a lot of hard work, but who would soon enough give out and go down in a heap.

There are diseases the doctors do not or cannot name; not dangerous to life, perhaps, but interfering with the proper working of the body. There are partly understood unbalances and disturbances which were once called fanciful or imaginative, but which now are known to be real and out of the patient's control. We have literally no right to say that a man is

making or pretending feebleness until every possible means of restoration has been tried, until every investigation has been made; and then, half the time, we shall be wrong if we blame him for his illness.

As the years go by, medical men are learning better how to deal with these poorly defined illnesses. They are learning that one weak organ affects all the others and may interfere even with the proper working of the mind itself. They are learning that poor nourishment, with feeble muscles and badly poised body, may affect the proper action of even normal organs. They are learning that fear and misconception, the effort of the mind to protect itself against real or fancied harm, may produce states of great exhaustion. And they are finding ways to remedy these defects.

Of course, there are a few nervous individuals who "enjoy poor health." They should be criticized and ridiculed, urged and commanded, re-educated, until they reform. There is no excuse for the real idler. In my observa-

tion, however, the professional invalids are very few — an almost negligible number, especially in these war-times when the spirit of work and service is in the air. We must be very slow and careful in our judgment lest we do a serious harm.

Perhaps the hardest part of a nervous illness is the almost inevitable misunderstanding. Not only is the patient looked upon with suspicion, but he suspects himself of being a shirker. If he is not considered a fraud and made the subject of ridicule, he is too much pitied; too much pampered, and so, spoiled. Perhaps somewhere there is a nervous invalid who is fully understood and fairly managed. It would be a pleasure to find him.

The reason for these unhappy misunderstandings is not far to seek. What we call nervous prostration seems to involve the personality. The patient is depressed; there are times when he sees no light in the sun and no beauty in the moon. He is querulous and fault-finding, so gains a bad reputation. Per-

haps he becomes erratic and irresponsible, impulsive and thoughtless. All this list of bad qualities, and much more, may be the unhappy burden of the neurasthenic. Sometimes we find a nervous patient who is perfectly even and sweet-tempered. I generally suspect such a patient of duplicity, and I am not surprised when he says something behind my back that he would not say openly. Safety and sanity lie somewhere between these extremes.

I shall try in the next chapters to suggest some practical ways and means whereby the unfortunate victim of lowered vitality may find his way back to a tolerable, if not a happy, life.

III

MOODS AND OBSESSIONS

For what has he whose will sees clear
To do with doubt and faith and fear,
 Swift hopes and slow despondencies?
His heart is equal with the sea's
And with the sea-wind's, and his ear
 Is level to the speech of these,
And his soul communes and takes cheer
 With the actual earth's equalities,
Air, light, and night, hills, winds, and streams,
And seeks not strength from strengthless dreams.

SWINBURNE

WE criticize the slothfulness of the nervous invalid and have small patience with his whims and his erratic habits. Is there any excuse for a grown man who is afraid to go into a room full of people, or who is afraid to go out in the good sunlight lest he have a stroke of apoplexy? Does any one suppose that such painful obsessions are agreeable? It is true that after a while the observance of unnecessary caution and the assumption of absurd protective measures do give a strange relief to suffering, and so may be carried out selfishly without regard for the comfort of others.

We must not proceed to call these people cranks and punish them with ridicule, or attempt to break their wills and make them conform to the comfortable social traditions. Sometimes, perhaps, we can and should do just this; but more often the result is suffering and rebellion with the substitution of worse habits or the intensification of the old conditions.

I am not referring now to the testiness of the selfish and the habit-bound who must manage everything or make some one pay the penalty; but rather to those unhappy souls who, without wish to cause trouble to themselves or any one else, have become the victims of obsessions and superstitions which threaten to wreck all happiness.

We are beginning to realize that such conditions as I have mentioned, and worse, may come about in perfectly natural and inevitable ways. Certainly it is rare to find a person who does not possess in some degree the possibilities of nervous trouble, or who can claim to be wholly free from the fads and foibles that

we associate with the nervous invalid. We have only to examine our own experiences to understand how morbid fears and suggestions may arise and dominate. With a little self-study we shall realize that we are all of us full of the suggestions and superstitions that are the beginnings of fear.

Now, fear has a way of growing in some minds. It is like fire that gets in between partitions in a house and smoulders away until finally it breaks out and is hard to control. There are a few people who may be subject to all sorts of nervous shocks, but who never suffer fear in any great degree. There are others, suggestible or temporarily sensitive, who become easy prey to fear—fear which may smoulder from childhood only to break out at some remote, unexpected time. Sometimes we can trace nervousness and unfortunate habits to old or new fear and the conscious or unconscious effort of the victim to protect himself from evil. Often no such connection is evident, though we suspect its existence.

Many complex and mysterious cases of hysteria and nervous disease are apparently due to hidden fear. Serious nervous illness has been cured by the removal of fear — by a reasonable explanation and reassurance — even after the original misconception has been buried under a host of irrelevant symptoms.

We must not assume at once that the discovery of the cause of unreasonable apprehension will make relief easy. Often enough there are accompanying states of mind which must be overcome by complete re-education, and conditions of the body itself which must first be righted.

It has always seemed to me that the attempt to cure a nervous illness by elimination of a single fear is a futile business — something like catching a few rats in a trap while the breeding-place in the cellar goes without attention. Great relief comes, of course, when a dominant fear or anxiety is conquered; but there will always be cause for fear in the world. The fearful and timid attitude of mind must

be changed for one of steadiness and courage — a lifelong task for most of us, but one which will amply repay all effort. Once beyond a certain point and we shall be affected only by necessary and legitimate anxieties. But until that point is reached we shall be unhappy and perhaps ill with fear.

In the average case of nervous exhaustion, accompanied by moods and obsessions, we may rarely hope for permanent and complete relief from physical or medical measures alone. I am apt to say to my patients who ask relief from obsessive thoughts and from sleepless nights of trouble: "I can do nothing until you give me a cleaner, simpler background for my work. Now everything is confusion and prejudice; moreover, you are still too near to your moods to see them clearly and to meet them fairly, or to ignore them successfully."

Before there can be anything beyond a transient and unreliable calmness and happiness, there must be a purpose in life and a striving for fulfillment that carries all before

it, that dominates to the virtual exclusion of fear. Primal purpose is a vague thing to talk about or to understand. Doubtless it varies from time to time in form and in evidence. It is almost sure to be confused with some lesser purpose. Perhaps we may find an understanding of the greater through the less. The fine, strong purpose and inspiration which we see in the loves of men and of women will serve well for example. In true love we have a purpose sufficient to overcome obstacles for the attainment of its desire. The obstacles are heart-rending enough at times, but they do not destroy the affection; rather do they heighten it. Finally, the lover, if he is of the right sort, loves on even if he fails of his object and is denied forever the surrender and embrace of his love. Deep as it is beyond most other impulses and desires, love itself springs from a deeper source, and that source is wrapped up in the final significance, the final justification of life.

We know a primal purpose best by its work-

ing, by the sense of obligation in us which will not be satisfied, but which urges us on and on toward achievement that is worthy and fine. We know it when we realize that the demand for achievement is pure and unselfish, seeking no reward. All through life this instinct finds its way and will not be wholly denied, though we choke it and stifle it and constantly substitute lesser and meaner motives. When the lesser and meaner motives have predominated, then come confusion and despair. With the confusion come, as a matter of course, varying moods of unhappiness and dissatisfaction with life.

“Yet still from time to time, vague and forlorn,
From the soul’s subterranean depths upborne
As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.”

Because we do not or will not uncover and know that “buried life”; because we do not recognize its manifestation in the confusion and complexity of our experience, we are unhappy and melancholy “in all our day.”

It is a long way back to the primitive sources of strength and understanding, and the journey must often be accompanied with pain and disappointment. The way is blocked by selfishness, by fear, by mental and physical weakness; by material obstacles of a thousand sorts. Only rarely may we know the "true, original course." When we do, we shall have vision that sees through all the complexities of life. We shall return to every-day matters with a courage and faith which are more than equal to the difficulties. In such an opening of the eyes man sees more than himself, more than life and its meaning—he comes face to face with the Creator of life, he is born again. Sickness and death he will have, no doubt, but they will be properly placed and understood; they will be part of the divine plan.

The reader will understand now why I am impatient of moods; why I will not treat them as such. It is necessary to clear life of tangling details as far as possible, that the real, the true instincts may have their way. This simplifi-

cation and purification of life can always be accomplished to some extent if we are patient and desire it. When we have known it even in a small degree, there will be a transformation in our moods and even in the fatigue and nervous exhaustion which are born of worry and fear. Individuals will differ widely in their interpretation and expression of life, but there will be a common seriousness and purpose which will be of the utmost service both to the physician and his patient in their task of restoring health and happiness.

IV

PRACTICAL PATIENCE

Teach me your mood, Oh patient stars
That climb each night the ancient sky.

EMERSON

SUPPOSE you are physically or nervously disabled; that you tire easily; that you are full of doubts and fears. You are irritable, depressed, generally ineffective and unhappy. What can be done about it? Leaving out of the question for the time being any idea of immediate recovery, what course can you pursue?

My first word of advice is this: pitch your life to a low key. There is nothing more painful and futile than the attempt of a singer to sing higher or lower than his compass. Keep down within your own limitations however humiliating they may be. Make the few notes of your life ring true; give them the best quality that is in you and you have half solved the problem of a limited life.

As a rule it does little good to say to the

nervous patient, "You must save your strength, you must be moderate in all things." Neither is it good advice to say, "Do a little more each day until you reach your limit." In this way the limit is reached too soon and with the limit comes collapse. Progress for the constitutionally weak or for the nervously unstrung must be very gradual and often along a series of planes rather than up a continuous incline. If the nervous invalid would be content to do the same thing day after day for a considerable time without increasing; then increase a little, only to continue without a further advance for days or weeks, there would be fewer discouraged and dejected people in the world. The ambitious neurasthenic commonly begins his day with all the force he can command. He commonly finds himself exhausted long before the day is done. I believe it is usually best to begin the effort of each morning very gradually, slowly mounting to a maximum and slowly declining to a close. There are, no doubt, many exceptions to this

rule; but breakfast in bed is sometimes good strategy, not in the least deserving the odium it usually receives in this hustling generation. There is much also to be said for frequent short periods of rest. The fighting giant of mythological fame who gained strength from Mother Earth every time he was knocked down, who rose refreshed whenever he came in contact with the ground, may perhaps find his modern counterpart in the man or woman of limited strength who is wise enough to break into sustained effort with frequent short rests.

It is a fact, verified by many experiences, that, other things being equal, the nervously sick and the slowly convalescent may increase the range of effectiveness in this gradual way to a point often far beyond expectations.

When headway has been lost and idleness has become necessary, we may often choose a very simple, elementary task or activity — preferably some light manual work — and by graded effort arrive at surprising attainments.

It happens a good many times that improved capacity for a given kind of physical exertion means a gain in every way: improvement in patience, power of sustained effort, and in general ability.

For a good many years I have been using hand-weaving in my practice, as a sort of scale on which my patients may climb back to efficiency when for almost any reason efficiency has been lost. This old craft has surprising possibilities. It requires, in a moderate degree, the exercise of the faculties most apt to suffer in nervous breakdown. Patience, steadiness, smoothness of action, are all developed by hand-weaving. The too impulsive, the irritable, find that they cannot do good work if they indulge in their favorite weakness. The slow, the fussy, and the inept discover that they must learn facility and ease of action. Insensibly the good, practical traits are brought out and trained by this simple work. If the weaving can be done in company with other patients, each sees the others' faults and

so corrects his own. Weaving is a kind of game which almost any one will play with amusement and zest. But it is much more than a game, it is an actual training for renewed life.

It is surprising how little a really tired and nervously upset person can do at first without exhaustion and harm; and still more surprising, in many cases of great weakness, how quickly the amount of work can be increased with benefit.

Nervous exhaustion is usually a complex condition involving physical defect and mental difficulties as well. The patient, sometimes through fear of failure, through shame of his disability, has become unsocial — he dreads to be with other people and he has become sensitized so that noise and confusion are painful and disconcerting. If he attempts to go back to life directly he fails. He may often find his way to balance and poise through such an occupation as weaving in a sanatorium workshop where the social demands are only incidental.

Indirection — that is the key to many a cure. The direct attempt to gain a foothold often fails miserably. Argument repels; philosophy and religion fail. So simple an expedient as hand-weaving, guided, directed, controlled by skilled teachers, will sometimes win the day. The patient finds himself restored to something like full efficiency.

The thoughtless observer will say this proves that many nervous patients could acquire strength and health if they would only use will power in the ordinary affairs of life. As a matter of fact, it is very often absolutely necessary to resort to some such expedient as I have mentioned. The usual paths of recovery are blocked by fear and obsession and because they are so fully associated with failure.

There is no magic, of course, in hand-weaving; but like any other manual work it may be made to stand for something larger. Neither is this nor any other occupation likely to cure an affliction which can be reached only by

medicine or surgery of the usual sort. But if the lifeless and listless, or the ambitious but impotent patient can acquire a background of carefully prescribed work, the chances of physical or nervous recovery will be greatly improved. Incidentally, there may be a product of real commercial value. In war-time, when the world is so poor, productive industry even of the most limited sort is not to be despised. If every handicapped person were set to work in some small productive way, the material results might become an industrial asset of inestimable material value, to say nothing of the moral gain which always comes with accomplishment.

V

RECALLED TO LIFE

It had not yet occurred to the civilized world that it was possible to do without beauty in the things which one handled every day. And that strict, natural union of use and beauty kept extravagance out of things made for a definite purpose. The appropriate fulfilling of the purpose was what the craftsman aimed at.

.

It is useless to show us feeble work merely because it is handmade. Virtue never was its own reward on such dubious conditions.

ARTHUR SYMONS

For work is not the punishment of a Paradise long lost
But rather the only means of ever attaining to it.

JOSE SANTOS CHOCANO

“RECALLED TO LIFE” is the title of an English magazine which is published in the interest of the crippled soldiers who are being restored to efficiency through the agency of curative workshops and special industries. It seems that the war cripples are not to be left to degenerate in idleness, to become a dead weight upon the Nation. Through the medium of curative workshops and re-vocational schools the men

are to be restored as far as is possible to self-respect and self-support. They will be literally recalled to life, for surely it is life to work and to produce. If a man has a ray of productive possibility in him, it is to be fostered and developed by these new schools.

At first thought it seems a little hard to require a poor disabled, discouraged man to bestir himself when he so well deserves the comfort of idleness. But experience teaches that idleness is not happiness, and that work, however trivial, is almost essential to the health and well-being of the human animal.

Toward the end of any illness that is likely to leave some permanent disablement, there comes a time when the full force of the misfortune strikes home. This is the time when idleness is most disastrous. This is the time for depression and foreboding and for the hopelessness which unmans. The crippled soldier is very apt to say to himself, "Well, I have done my part. Now the Government can take care of me." Even if there were no moral

reason why the man should take care of himself if he can, there is economic necessity back of the new movement. It will be simply impossible for any of the nations at war to support the number of men who would require support if no effort were made at rehabilitation. So the military authorities are training the crippled soldiers back to usefulness, recalling them to life, lifting them from the morass of idleness and degeneration into which so many of them would sink if no effort were made to save them.

Of course, the problem of rehabilitation is immense. It involves a literal re-education in some instances; it means the establishment of trade schools especially equipped, the creation of a new factory system or the readjustment of the old system to make room for the intelligent but handicapped worker. A little reading of the magazine "Recalled to Life," or of similar war literature, will gladden the hearts of those who care for the fate of the cripple. The Lord Roberts Memorial Workshops in

England are already on a self-supporting basis. These shops are manufactories in effect — they study the trade and aim to supply the market with salable products.

An attempt is being made to differentiate rather sharply between curative workshops and bedside occupations with their comparatively trivial products, and the re-vocational system which aims to put the men back into the regular ranks of industry. The lesser occupations are intended, first of all, to arouse the interest of the discouraged patient, to train his hand and eye back into coördinate and useful lines. For this purpose all manner of small occupations are in use — military revivals of the ancient crafts. The making of wooden toys, basket-weaving, and rug-making are among the occupations recommended for our own convalescent hospitals. These and many other occupations are now employed in many of the warring countries.

Work with the hands is a definitely medical procedure. It has a restorative value almost

on a par with medicine and surgery, since it restores confidence, teaches patience and ingenuity, and encourages the patient to further effort. While any trivial occupation will serve some purpose in this direction, it is exceedingly important that the prescribed work should not be too foolish or quite valueless in its product.

There are very few real craftsmen left in the world. Machinery and haste and poor taste have well-nigh destroyed the once dignified and desirable creative field. The old-time care and patience, the excellent design and color work, are rarely found to-day. In their places, for the most part, we see cheap imitations, atrocious color and bad design. Now, there is still a place in the world for good design and careful workmanship. Is it too much to ask that there should be some discrimination in what we ask the crippled soldiers to do when they are re-training for life and activity?

For the most part the men will make the bedside occupations only a stepping-stone to the larger and the standardized occupations.

But here and there will be a man who cannot hope to work in the larger way; here and there a man in whom the making of wooden toys will waken some old instinct which can be developed into something like the true crafts spirit. Perhaps there will grow out of the war crippling a guild of craftsmen, silversmiths, leather-workers, tapestry-weavers, designers.

This article is really a plea for good instruction while we are about it; for good models and good designs in the curative work shops. There are enough badly woven baskets and poorly tooled bits of leather, lopsided pieces of pottery and badly colored fabrics, in the world. Let those who would assist the despondent soldier back to usefulness find something really clever and good for him to do. The field of wooden toy-making is one of the largest and best opportunities. But the toys should be designed by a Maxfield Parrish if they are to be justified. The average American youth is clever enough with his hands to produce excellent results if he is guided and

directed by far-sighted teachers. The teacher need not be a designer. She — for it will usually be a woman — can bring to the handicapped worker good designs, good materials, and a contagious enthusiasm. The rest will be comparatively easy.

It does not take much imagination to realize that this principle of carefully directed handicapped labor may be applied to the vast field of industrial accidents. Every year there are thousands of workmen in our factories crippled for life in the ordinary pursuit of their duties. One of the good by-products of the great war may be an awakening to the possibilities of special workshops and special training for those who are handicapped in peaceful industry. Thousands of crippled workmen who are now discarded as useless may some day be systematically rehabilitated, "recalled to life." Some will go back into their trades and professions and some, who are more seriously crippled, may reestablish the beautiful old crafts for which the world has need.

VI

WAITING

From the Silence of Time, Time's Silence borrow.
In the heart of To-day is the word of To-morrow.
The Builders of Joy are the Children of Sorrow.

WILLIAM SHARP

THE power of money, the miraculous accomplishments of science, our wonderfully efficient transportation service, make most of us unwilling to wait for slow growth in anything. We are even in too great a hurry to read. We content our busy selves with reviews and digests. The unrolling film in the darkened theatre takes the place of the old-time romance. Gone forever are the days of the three-volume novel, the "Three Decker" that Kipling celebrates in beautiful verse: —

"Full thirty foot she towered from water line to rail,
It cost a watch to steer her, and a week to shorten sail;
But, spite all modern notions, I found her first and best —
The only certain packet for the Island of the Blest."

Illness, which so often puts a check upon swift accomplishments, may be cured hastily some-

times by the use of powerful medicines or by the skill of the surgeon, but there remains a long list of disabilities which call for continued patience and fortitude. If physicians are tired and even disgusted with the impatience of their patients, they are also surprised and cheered by the courage and endurance which now and then develop even among those who have been closely identified with the hurry and bustle of life. It has been my lot in later years to deal almost exclusively with illness that cannot be cured quickly — with “nervous” illness that tests the body and soul. And I wish here to record my profound admiration for the patience and steadiness which I have seen day after day in those who have suffered, in those who deplore the swift passing of time, and who cannot afford to wait for relief and cure. But I have seen impatience and discouragement, too, and I have tried to understand what makes the difference.

One great cause for impatience lies, of course, in uncertainty. If we could only be sure that

we were doing the right thing, that we were not making mistakes, we would be more willing to wait for recovery. It is easier than it used to be to get sound medical advice and treatment. The days of the quack doctor are numbered. An intelligent patient has little difficulty in recognizing the real thing in medicine. The good doctor does not veil his procedures in mystery. These are days of consultations. If the doctor in charge does not understand the nature of an illness and the appropriate treatment, he seeks information from special and expert sources. The hospital and the laboratory clear up many doubts. The doctor who pretends to know all there is to know about illness, or the specialist who is blind to everything outside his own particular line, is, or ought to be, avoided.

Suppose we are satisfied that we are taking the right course. Who of us is above impatience with the long days and nights that must pass in disability? I believe that one of our greatest sources of relief is found when we real-

ize that life is important and significant even in illness. Too often the patient says to himself, "I will begin to live when I am well." But what if that recovery is delayed and delayed? Discouragement settles into despair, still further putting off recovery. The various organs of the body do not thrive on despair. Neither do they readily accept the "grin and bear it" attitude which is the next step forward.

When I first tell a patient that illness and the long days of enforced leisure may represent a priceless opportunity, I expect to be laughed at or scorned. I know that pain and bodily discomfort will break into any such programme. But chronic illness is not all pain. The man who misses the opportunities of illness is just as remiss as, perhaps even more wasteful than, one who lets business opportunities slip by without using them. Moreover, the physician who does not point out the possibilities of leisure is as neglectful as one who fails to use an efficient remedy.

It is better, perhaps, not to use as a remedy

the opportunities of leisure. These opportunities are best used in a cultural and developmental sense. If life is worth living at all, it is worth living well. And it may be lived well even in illness.

The call to right living is not the final urge. The real call is the primal obligation that makes every man do his best wherever he may be placed.

We hear a great deal nowadays of national and community obligations, but it all figures down to the individual. It is in some deep way supremely important that the individual should reach his highest development. This individual development is commonly served in material accomplishment, in the perfecting of human relationships, in our human loves and friendships. But the relationships which involve character and which develop character are at their best only when they spring from the deepest of all sources. The deeper source is very subtle and hard to define. I do not know how to describe it. Grossly, it lies in a

development of the relationship of the individual with the infinite spirit that lies back of all life.

In illness, in the days and nights unoccupied with the occupations and diversions of business and social life, a man may draw very near to the borders of life — he may look over into the infinite with eyes of the spirit, he may feel with his heart what his bodily eyes and his brain do not understand.

The understanding of the heart may be clearest and best in illness. We may have to wait long before we understand. Comprehension does not come at once. Though illness makes priceless experiences possible, it also clouds and obscures. The growth of a closer relationship between the individual and the being we call God is undoubtedly the greatest of human progressions. It overshadows all else, interprets all else. If health and even human love are taken from us, the divine relationship stands and is greater than these. A man who feels a personal relationship with God knows a

growing independence of the vicissitudes of life. He needs life for expression, he needs the home and the office and the shop where he can work out his inspiration in terms of life. But fully adequate expression may also be found in the narrow confines of his room or the still narrower limits of his heart.

VII

JUSTIFICATION

Now the just shall live by faith.

Hebrews 10:38

Calm soul of all things, be it mine
To know, amid the city's jar,
That there remains a peace of Thine
Man did not make and cannot mar.

MATTHEW ARNOLD

IN the course of long illness many a naturally brave and patient soul questions the use of further effort and says secretly if not openly: "Why should I keep on trying, I shall always be handicapped? I am a burden to myself and to my family." This is a cry of suffering which we must in some way answer. But to make answer we must touch upon questions which are not usually approached by the doctor in dealing with his patient — indeed, they are commonly ignored or avoided by all of us in our relationship to life. We must find our way into deep, still places of the spirit if we are to answer at all. We cannot always say

to the tortured mind, "Just have courage, you will soon be better." The honest patient soon has enough of that. Such an answer does not satisfy; it meets only the first requirements. It is not bread but a stone to the man who knows that he can never be wholly well.

Men commonly justify themselves by the needs of the hour, of the day or the year. They live and work because they wish to obtain some material end; because they wish to gain knowledge and power, wealth and position; because they want to provide for their families. Sometimes, and this is better, they work for the joy of working, and for the relief and satisfaction which come from good deeds well done.

The dear delights of youth, with human love and the spur of splendid ambition — these are enough while they last. But they do not last forever. Disappointment and sorrow cloud the scene; illness and dependence sap the courage, and some day comes the old cry of suffering and protest — "What is the use of trying any more?" Even love may die or fail to meet

the long strain of suffering. What is there to live for; what is left? "Faith in God remains." We say that perhaps a little hesitatingly and we are sometimes laughed at for our pains. It happens that faith in God may disappear also.

I suppose the older generation, with a more precise and a better religious schooling, may have had less trouble in retaining a working faith. There is something about the high tension, stimulating life of to-day that makes men lose sight of the eternal verities; that makes them put their faith in material accomplishment, in sky-scrapers and bridges and tunnels, in limited trains, in aeroplanes, in guns and ammunition, in money and in power — all good things in their place, and when they are justified by an understanding and a vision which puts them and keeps them in their place. It is when they become all, and sufficient in themselves, that our fine fabric of accomplishment comes tumbling down about our heads and earth becomes a desert place. How long

shall we live this way — failing to see that material accomplishment is nothing unless it is the expression of a deep experience within us which we call faith in God? Perhaps the great war, with its devastation of cities, with its dependence upon fire and steel, will open our eyes and make us see our folly.

To the modern mind, untrammelled, independent as it is, the phrase — faith in God — is altogether too vague and impractical; it is hardly more than a phrase. The invalid cannot go to church and the well too often do not go. We cannot all have the inspiration of common worship. The old formulæ — the old beauty of form and ritual — are failing to hold those who need most the comfort and hope that the church can give. It seems that each generation must have its conception of God and that modern materialism, luxury, and what we call education, have not yet found their God.

Some day — soon, perhaps — there will come shining through the smoke of the cities a new

religious understanding which will be the old understanding, the old faith made acceptable to the modern mind. It may be that the ghastliness of war, the crash and ruin of the great guns, is the one experience that will destroy complacency and hopelessness together. The sick and the well may realize suddenly the need of a faith which transcends all suffering and all loss.

The sun still shines over the battle-fields and the moon still throws her splendor upon the treacherous sea. In the glory and loveliness of these changeless things man may once more have his vision of God — a vision that will sustain him through all trials and all vicissitudes.

As I have worked among my patients and have understood the hopelessness that comes when there is no vision, I have realized that much misunderstanding comes from the failure to see that each of us must create and maintain his own idea and vision of God. Suppose a hundred people say over together the Apos-

bles' Creed and that all believe it literally, or think they do; does any one suppose that the words mean the same thing to each of the hundred worshipers? Some of the number really do believe literally and are satisfied, content; but there will be not a few who see only beautiful symbols — whose real meaning, whose reality, is far, far beyond the power of the mind to grasp or to understand. For those who cannot visualize God, who worship really only the beauty of the sea and sky, and who are affected only by these and by the yearning of their own hearts, there must be suffering and often a great darkness. They do not understand; they are not satisfied. Yet they may be nearer the truth than are those who are easily satisfied. Human words, human ideas, can scarcely compass the infinite, and yet it is through the medium of human words and ideas that we all must interpret and use even the divine teachings of Christ.

We must have the greatest sympathy for those who are dissatisfied; who are struggling

and groping to find hope and faith. It is fair, I think, to comfort them and to assure them that they may not be far from the kingdom of heaven. Their faithlessness may really be faith after all, and faith in the best sense.

When there is faith, or essential faith, there is also obligation. I think we may almost say that unless there is a sense of obligation there is no faith. Somehow, the consciousness of divinity, even that which is expressed only in the infinite beauty of nature, brings a sense of conscience and of obligation to live up to the ideal. We know instinctively that what is low and mean, what is hopeless and irresponsible, is out of keeping, is unworthy of us if we are parts of the great plan. And so we proceed, intermittently and painfully and imperfectly, to live up to the dignity and beauty of life. No matter if we cannot quite explain why we should do this, we feel the obligation and we follow it. If such a course leads us, as well it may, to a literal acceptance of the Christian faith — well and good. If it leaves us, in our

own estimation, or in the estimation of others, outside the pale — still struggling, searching for a faith which may never quite conform with what we expect, or others expect for us — there need be no despair. If we are earnest and true, we shall accept the obligation of patience and courage and right living; we shall be justified in a sense. We shall know in our hearts that there is use in living and in doing the very best that we can in whatever circumstances we may be placed.

VIII

THE MIDDLE COURSE

Moderation is the silken string running through the pearl chain of all virtues.

BISHOP HALL (1574-1656)

ANY physician will agree that much illness, and especially nervous illness, comes from failure to follow a moderate middle course. It is true that many of us have no choice. Necessity demands overwork. The school-teacher must concentrate on her work or fail. The laborer must pursue his own line though it crushes him. But we all overdo or overemphasize when there is little or no excuse. The excessive worrier ruins his chance of successful living. The victim of an unhappy marriage makes his plight the more serious by dwelling upon his unhappiness. The girl enamoured of excitement paves the way for nervous breakdown when she subordinates all else to the pursuit of pleasure. The business or the professional man kills himself by his failure to

take exercise and to devote a considerable part of his life to fun or to some hobby which would change and relieve his tired faculties. The housewife who is so fussy that she wastes her energies daily in a vain attempt to attain perfection — why does she do it? She is rightly scornful of her shiftless neighbor who spends the forenoon in *négligée* and her afternoon at whist; but she fails to see that there is a middle course, or knowing a better way, a more reasonable way, she will not follow it.

Let us suppose a young woman who has an emotional nature. Her mother was a nervous invalid — excitable, uneven, prone to extremes of excitement or depression. The girl was brought up in an atmosphere of unrest. She was never taught to apply herself persistently to any task. She admits that she is tired of life since it will yield her no more pleasure. A study of symptoms reveals the fact that certain people excite her, any argument or strong emotion leaves her trembling and weak. She does not sleep well. Her bodily functions are out of

order. She has had to leave school and now spends her time in bed or in flying from one extreme of feeling to the other.

It does no good to scold such a person and to tell her she must calm down and acquire an even middle course. Such an illness must be attacked from all possible points. The girl must, of course, be advised to tranquilize her life and she must try to do this. We must do what can be done by diet and medical treatment. We must build up her physique by exercises, walks, out-of-door living. We must teach physical relaxation. Whenever possible, the patient must be taken out of the old environment which has become strongly associated with her illness.

Nothing is more unwise than to prescribe some new form of excitement to stimulate her already worn-out faculties. Rather should we find and maintain a life of monotony. Complete physical rest is a good enough start, but it must not be allowed to continue too long lest the patient become dependent upon

protection. If there were no physical objection, I would, if I could, find and make practical some simple, monotonous work. Usually it is impossible to force monotony and we may ask only a gradual progression. Anything which uses the faculties steadily and simply will do. Reading, sewing, embroidering, will serve for a beginning. The only requisite is that there be no excitement.

We might with advantage teach such a patient to think and act, even to talk, slowly and without emotion. She will rebel at first, perhaps, and will decide that such a dull life cannot be tolerated. But after a while she will experience the relief of monotony.

I suppose that people who work for a living rarely understand the debt they owe to monotony. It is of the greatest value — a steadying, equalizing force. Many and many a flighty, emotional person is saved by monotony from burning out the precious nervous powers.

Beyond all this we may well attempt to bring about a serious purpose in life. If there

is to be a real cure, the efforts must be directed toward some useful end outside of self; not perfunctory service, though that is better than nothing, but service which is the expression of a generous heart. We serve our own and our families' needs — well and good; but the service which helps more than that goes outside and finds ways of helping the world of men. Can such service be commanded? I think so. It may be necessary to command it literally at first. But there is a warmth and a graciousness in service which is its own reward. Even here we must insist upon moderation, evenness, and persistence. If we cannot find constant expression of the idea of service we can at least keep alive the desire that waits patiently for opportunity.

It is true that self must be cultivated and made good. We need not be feverishly anxious for active service if the mind is being schooled to self-control, to an even, reasonable course. If illness is severe and disabling, there must be no frantic effort to escape — only a calm,

reasonable acceptance which waits patiently for strength and opportunity. We must understand the difference between this kind of self-consideration and sheer selfishness.

After all, the best remedy for the ills of emotion is self-forgetfulness. Never are we more truly ourselves, more characteristic and personal, than when we forget ourselves in the service of others. Such self-forgetfulness can hardly come until we have slowed life down to a strong, even current of thought and action. The sudden blaze of generous enthusiasm soon dies and is gone, bringing back self and darkness.

Is there such a thing as service for selfish ends? I suppose so, but it must be rare. It will never be found in us if we understand that service is really the finest expression of self.

I have written all this in defense of monotony, and yet I would not have life really monotonous. I do not wish to advocate unemotionalism except as a remedy, but I do urge it as a necessary balance for those who

overdo emotion. I have said that many a man owes his physical and nervous health to such a preponderance of calm or to the voluntary or involuntary acceptance of a middle course in business or profession. Moderation must become second nature if we are to be successful in the larger sense. The moderate man may earn fewer dollars and have a smaller business. The moderate woman may have a lesser social success. But there will probably be more real happiness, longer life, and better health.

In emotion and deep feeling we shall have, no doubt, the greatest joy of life; but only if we are well enough to bear the stress, only if there is a balance which keeps us from being worn out. When that balance is attained we may welcome intense feeling. The man who can witness suffering without emotion is not to be trusted. Give generously of tears and smiles and hearty laughter, but do not forget the need of steady, invincible purpose. Balance life; steer the middle course; do not bear down too hard on work or play; find opportunity

for service, for self-forgetfulness, for serenity, and you will be able to meet emotional demands safely and well.

All this is truism. Not a word that I have written in this chapter but is known and understood by every one who thinks at all. Why write it, then? Because it needs to be said, over and over again, until by sheer repetition it makes an impression upon our own careless and forgetful minds.

IX

MEDICAL PARTNERSHIP

No man is so foolish, but may give another good counsel sometimes; and no man is so wise, but may easily err, if he will take no other counsel but his own. But very few men are wise by their own counsel or learned by their own teaching. For he that was only taught by himself, hath a fool for a master.

BEN JONSON

OCCASIONALLY we see a real partnership in medicine. Too often, the men who might be strengthened by coöperation are working singly, even in competition and at cross-purposes.

I know of one young man who had the good fortune to acquire a large practice almost immediately after leaving the hospital. Instead of keeping it all to himself, instead of degenerating into a drudge, he invited a young medical man of his own age to come into partnership. These two men together were able to do a great deal more good medical work than either could have done alone, and they gave the community in which they lived a quality

of service which would have been impossible without coöperation. Naturally the second man was not very busy at first. He attended to the emergencies and saved his partner from rushing about on these sudden calls to the detriment of his daily routine. The second man was able to do a lot of advanced laboratory work such as had never been done before in the town where the two men lived. By pooling their interests they could afford special appliances, a progressive library, large and well-equipped offices.

In the evenings the two men held little conferences concerning their practice. They worked independently, learning their own lessons, making their own mistakes, but profiting mutually by their experience.

I have no doubt their patients gained greatly by the arrangement, and I am sure the young men did, for among the advantages they had leisure. Each was able to make occasional trips to the neighboring city. They kept up their hospital relationships and could relax

at theater or club without the haunting fear that something was going wrong at home or that some rival was appropriating the practice.

Finally, after many years of coöperative work, several partners having come and gone, the first man was able to take up a specialty — a specialty enriched and broadened by all this coöperative work in the field of general medicine.

It is common, though not common enough, for older men to take young graduates into partnership. But I wish the example of these younger associates might be more generally followed. We should then far less often see the unfortunate spectacle of the general practitioner doing inferior work because of overwork. We should not see so many good men wearing out before their time. And more important still, there would be less reason for the modern tendency toward the substitution of the hospital for the family doctor.

I realize that the hospital with its perfected

equipment, with its association of highly trained specialists, must occupy a position of ever-increasing importance. The hospital solves, and will continue to solve, many a knotty medical problem which would never be properly met by the general practitioner working alone or even by such partnerships as I have described. But we ought never to lose the general practitioner. His varied experience, his intimate knowledge of the patient and the patient's home conditions, supply a point of view that the impersonal hospital group can never attain. If the men in general medicine will only work together they will never cease to justify themselves.

As a matter of fact, a large proportion of the problems which are presented to the family doctor are not medical problems at all in the literal sense, but social and personal affairs, which need the medical viewpoint, to be sure, but which need more than that — the calm judgment of one who knows the facts from personal observation. It is quite possible

to study into the physical functions, the heart, the liver, the kidneys, and all, using the most intricate and perfect apparatus without once approaching the real personal need of the patient.

Undoubtedly there are a large number of incompetent general practitioners who are not serving well their communities; but there is and always will be an immense field of usefulness for the general practitioner, especially if he will not depend wholly upon his own personal experience, but will use the hospitals and the knowledge of his fellow-workers whenever it is possible to do so.

All this leads up to the idea of another kind of medical partnership even more important — a partnership of physician and patient. Too often the patient goes to the doctor complaining of some symptom for which he demands instant relief, but without being willing to take the physician into his confidence at all. No wonder there are failures. Not long ago a young woman appeared in a doctor's office

stating that she had consulted many other physicians, all of first-class standing, and that none of them had done her any good. She complained of headache, indigestion, and sleeplessness. The doctor went over her history carefully and made a complete physical examination without finding anything amiss. "Now," said he, "I do not wish to pry unnecessarily into your private life, but I must know if you are happy with your husband, I must know a lot of things about your relationship with him." Evidently there was something wrong, for she angrily refused to answer many of his questions. "Well, madam," said the doctor, "I am sorry that you feel that way. My interest is wholly professional and impersonal, but I cannot help you at all if you are not perfectly frank with me." So she left him and he did not expect to see her again. But she came back in a few days glad to confess to certain personal failures which had brought about misunderstanding and unhappiness. Her unwillingness to give

up a selfish indulgence had brought about a struggle in her own mind which resulted in serious nervous strain. This woman became a firm friend of the impertinently inquisitive doctor and did much to increase his already good practice. She told him that every other doctor she had consulted gave her a few pills and a little smiling advice about overdoing, pocketed the fee, and bowed her politely out.

It is possible to establish a real partnership between doctor and patient — a partnership founded on coöperation, mutual confidence, and helpfulness. Such a partnership will clear up many a puzzling situation and incidentally relieve much suffering.

Choose your medical partner carefully. He must be a man whom you can trust. Then give him your whole confidence, otherwise there can be no true coöperation and the results of medical treatment will be unsatisfactory.

There is no excuse for the doctor who is superficial, who is afraid to ask questions for

fear of being misunderstood; and there is no excuse for the patient who refuses to answer. It is true that many human problems are too subtle and complex to allow of easy solution even when all the facts are known. But surely no progress will be made until the facts are known. Tell what you know of yourself. Frequently you will be in the dark as to the true reasons for trouble, but you can at least state all the facts, leaving the doctor to interpret and explain. Do not fall into the error of supposing that unhappiness can have no effect upon the body. There are plenty of purely physical ills, but they are nearly all modified by what you think about them and what you think about life. Sometimes an illness is wholly due to some maladjustment with life, a fault which can be easily corrected. If it cannot be easily corrected, the physician, if he is a wise man, can help immensely, for he is looking at the matter objectively and is not confused and blinded by your too close relationship with the problem.

X

TRUTH-TELLING IN MEDICINE

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would
triumph:
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
Sleep to wake.

ROBERT BROWNING

It makes all the difference in the world how the truth is told. The expression of the face, the tone of the voice, the choice of words, all count. The patient watches eagerly to learn his fate and too often he imagines a fate which he does not deserve and which will never come to him. On the other hand, it is quite possible for the doctor to be so over-discreet that the essential truth is not understood at all. It is certainly not good practice to encourage a mortally sick man, week after week, with a false hope of recovery. A surgeon once told me of an illuminating experience. The patient was sent to him for operation as a last resort.

It was evident to the doctor that operation would do no good; that it was, in fact, impossible. Without hesitation he told the patient this and added that he probably had about two months to live. The man was profoundly, pathetically grateful for such a straight opinion. "Well," said he, "if I fight for it I can finish my book." He had been engaged in important research work, much of which would have been rendered useless if he had not received timely warning. For months he might have been at work collecting his scattered data if the doctors in charge had not been afraid to tell him the truth.

He is a wise physician who can tell the truth without spoiling it and his patient. In the long-continued diseases where there are many chances of improvement if not of cure, we must think twice before we state our opinion. Man is mortal, he will die sometime undoubtedly, but it is not necessary to scare him to death by bald and unmodified medical statements. Sometimes the physician himself is honestly

mistaken and tells for truth what afterward proves to be false, greatly to the patient's distress and to his own discredit. In the field of heart and kidney affections especially, there is a great opportunity for faulty truth-telling. The physician discovers undeniable evidence of organic disease. He so informs his patient. When asked for a prognosis he tells what he believes to be the truth,—that his patient cannot live out the year. Foolish truth-teller, unhappy patient. The doctor may have been too liberal; the patient may be dead in a month, but he may outlive his physician by many years.

All this brings us naturally enough to the subject of the so-called imaginary ailments. The modern physician — especially if he has a reputation for skill in nervous troubles — is besieged by people who recount long lists of unhappy symptoms, but who have, by every reliable test, no disease at all. How easy it is to tell the apparent truth and to say, "there is nothing the matter with you"; but

the results of such a dictum may be very far-reaching and very bad. It is true, of course, that there are imaginary illnesses that can be dispelled by such cheerful information. But very, very often the illness is real enough, though the symptoms do not fit into any recognized category. There is usually something the matter when man, woman, or child gives up work or play and seeks medical aid. It should be the serious business of the physician to find out all there is to know.

Functional disease of the organs has been recognized for a long time. Stomach, heart, any of the vital organs become painful and cease to perform their functions properly without being really diseased. Very lately physicians have begun to understand subtle unbalances of such glands as the thyroid, the supra-renals, and the pituitary body. The symptoms of these disorders may be simple nervousness and lack of strength. Only rest and careful observation will make clear these conditions and permit of their relief. Much

distress might be avoided if the physician were less inclined to make light of the symptoms; if he were to gain time, if he needs it, by the giving of some simple tonic which could do no harm, but which would improve the general vigor and bring the patient back for further observation and treatment. A man who has some real trouble, even though it is a slight one, may be put into a very embarrassing position by a premature statement of the "truth."

In these days we see a good many apparently miraculous cures by Christian Science, by New Thought, by prayer, and by other unmedical means. There is no doubt at all that many painful illnesses are relieved in such ways. Physicians would be wiser to acknowledge this and to admit the truth. And would it not be better still if the Christian Scientists would also tell the truth, admitting that they cannot cure organic disease? They would lose nothing by such admission. They can relieve, often do relieve, the troubled, hopeless mind, and in this way greatly improve even badly

diseased bodies. But they also do irreparable harm when they claim to cure such diseases as cancer or diphtheria, thereby deceiving the patient and letting pass the precious time when an operation or a serum injection might save life.

There is a very subtle and unfortunate kind of deception frequently indulged in by patient and doctor alike — self-deception; alas, it is too common. A man wants to believe this or that and makes himself do so. I have known a doctor who knew that a patient had tuberculosis, but who was so anxious to have it otherwise that he failed until too late to take the necessary steps for cure. Nearly all of us condone in our patients habits of selfishness which would be much better frankly condemned. Illness is a little world in itself. There is, perhaps, as much dishonesty and insincerity among invalids as among business men. Once below a certain level of nervous tone, the tendency is for a man to excuse in himself all kinds of weaknesses. It is easy for the physician to

forgive this in a patient and so to lay the foundation of continued self-indulgence. Great wisdom and experience are necessary to distinguish between culpable weakness and weakness which cannot be helped.

Physicians must learn to face their medical problems squarely and yet with an understanding which is human and kindly. They must learn that no absolute standard of behavior can be set for the individual; that everything depends upon circumstances. The questions must be: Is this patient doing the best he can with his life? Am I doing the best I can for my patient?

Perhaps we shall come nearer to the truth when patients and doctors revise their ideals a little. The best results are not always those that are nearest to physical perfection. The man who finished his book bravely and thankfully in the short time he had to live came nearer to success and so to virtual cure than many a one who idles along through a long but comparatively useless life. He did not fail,

though he died at the time predicted. The doctor who inspires his patients to brave and effective living in spite of unavoidable limitations may safely tell the truth as he sees it.

There is too much of cowardice in us; that is really the reason why we cannot bear the truth. Every one must face death. There is nothing to be afraid of in that. What we should fear is moral failure. No one need confess to that if he has done, or if he will finally do, the best he can with his life.

XI

A WAY OUT

Soon the large mild stars of springtime
Will resume the ancient twilight
And restore the heart of earth
To unvexed eternal poise;
For the great Will, calm and lonely,
Can no mortal grief derange,
No lost memories perturb;
And the sluices of the morning
Will be opened, and the daybreak
Well with bird-calls and with brook-notes,
Till there be no more despair
In the gold dream of the world.

BLISS CARMAN

A SANATORIUM is a place where people, who, for any reason, are not able to live successfully at home, may find special conditions which make health and happiness possible.

There is great and increasing need of such institutions. If they are what they ought to be, they will do much more than provide the conditions of protected living.

Too many people fail in life who might be happy and effective under special conditions, or who might, with a little judicious training

and reconstruction of mind and body, be made equal to the most trying conditions anywhere. A great improvement in sanatorium aim and management has taken place within the past twenty years. The sanatorium was too often a sort of dumping-ground for the unfit; a place where poor souls, unwelcome or impossible at home, were literally incarcerated, and where the principal occupation was the exchange of doleful life histories. All that has passed or is passing. The modern sanatorium is more like a school than a hospital. It does sometimes accommodate helpless patients who can never be active again; but it is more often a lively, busy center of reconstructive activity.

There should be no prejudice against the sanatorium, and no hesitation about securing its advantages for those who need its care.

A young woman has broken down, as we say, nervously. She has a naturally frail and poorly functioning body. She has been put through the usual mill of education without any particular regard to her limitations. Being

a young person of spirit, she has kept up and met the requirements of school, social, and family life until she can do so no longer. Her complaints are manifold. She gives out with indigestion, irritability, headache, backache, and an unreasonable fatigue on the slightest exertion — the typical nervous wreck. She is sent to the best physicians, who go over her with care. They find no organic disease. They advise a change of air, diet, a companion. They assure the parents and the girl that there is nothing the matter because they cannot find any of the usual signs of heart, kidney, liver, or brain disease. The patient is game; she undertakes to shake off her nervousness. Perhaps she succeeds for a while, but all the symptoms return with increased force because she naturally enough pushes beyond the limits of her strength.

The girl accuses herself; her friends and her family openly or covertly accuse her of being queer or a quitter. After a series of plunges and a like number of collapses she settles

into chronic invalidism. Moral and physical strength are likely to go by the board together because there is nothing more discouraging than honest effort which is rewarded with continued failure. Such a person needs desperately to go to a sanatorium, not for the continued pushing of an inadequate human machine, probably not for a further attempt to make her fit the conventional requirements; but for a careful and leisurely study of her limitations, for a considerable time of real rest with minimum effort of any kind, and, finally, for a building-up of force and initiative within the natural and inevitable limitations.

In the sanatorium it should be possible to discover just what her failure means and what check she must put upon her future activities. More often than not there will be discovered definite physical defects — a flabby muscular system with a drooping body that cannot function properly without a great deal of muscle-building and nourishing, a long process of reposturing and setting-up of the droop-

ing spine and prolapsed internal organs. More often than not it will be found that as a result of continued failure a naturally good nervous apparatus has lost the art of efficient action. Often enough also such a patient is adrift in her philosophy of life. The simple faith of childhood has gone and nothing really adequate has taken its place. Here, then, is a situation which cannot be quickly helped, but which is very far from being beyond help.

It will not be unprofitable to follow this typical nervous invalid through a modern sanatorium experience. She arrives, we will say, on a gloomy day. The institution, beautifully situated as it is likely to be, has no charm for her. Her heart sinks at the sight of her little room, but she goes to bed obediently. There is a sleepless night filled with foreboding. In the morning comes the doctor, but he has not the professional air and the usual long string of questions. He has provided himself, whenever that is possible, with full information about the patient, so that he will not be

obliged at once to go over the ground traversed so painfully by all the other physicians. He does ask her some questions, but they are very different from what she expected. They are friendly, reassuring questions. He does not attempt to make his diagnosis on the first visit, he may not even sound her heart and lungs; all that is likely to be reserved for a later date. He finds out how badly she sleeps, how discouraged she is; but he refuses to be drawn too far into the net of symptoms. Yet somehow he impresses her as knowing what he is about. There will probably be a few days, even a few weeks, in bed if the exhaustion is profound. She will be treated medically and relieved of some of her symptoms. Slowly the antagonism, the resentment, diminishes under the friendly ministrations of nurses and perhaps because of the silent influence of certain great trees that stand sturdily yet placidly between her window and the sky. After a while come the physical questions and the physical tests. She discovers that her body is

not unhealthy, but is badly hung and poised; that the feeble muscles could not, in the nature of things, hold her up to the physical requirements; that it is no wonder she is tired. These muscles and relaxed ligaments, she is told, can be restored to usefulness if she will be patient and obedient.

By good fortune she is not pushed and tried out to the utmost — to the breaking point. She is held back and given a little, only a very little, in the way of exercise, or even of treatment. Ah, if they had only known at home that weak muscles and nerves are not restored by overuse and that in such an illness very little use may be overuse. But they could not know. There were too many advisers. One would say, “exercise”; another, “rest”; and there was no one to prevent the harm of violent extremes.

After a while the patient learns to know the doctor not as a casual friend, but as a real and sound adviser; a friend surely, though of a new sort. Continued acquaintance makes possible

confidences and revelations which the specialist in his office could not gain. Even the family doctor, if she has been fortunate to know a man of that disappearing type, could not separate and disassociate the patient from the confusing elements of the home life and so could not judge quite clearly.

There is need of clear vision now and of wise counsel. It appears that there have been other nerve strains than those on the surface. Misunderstandings at home, misunderstandings in connection with the awaking of sexual life, a hopeless love — God knows what tangles of heart and mind. A wreckage made possible by the weak body and by a natural repression which could not speak and be understood. What wonder that faith has died and despair has supervened? A hard tangle, but not an uncommon one.

Fortunate for the girl if the physician does not attempt in a perfectly obvious way to set her right; if he does not assume that all she wants or needs is a little physical improve-

ment, the relief of symptoms. Probably he will listen patiently to the story and understand it. Then he will say, "We must not go into it too deeply now; when you are a little farther on the road to health we will come back to it."

Next on the programme is work, simple but effective work with the hands — handicrafts of the better sort which as a rule do not include a lot of doubtful productions in hammered brass and bad basketry. Rather a careful training in hand-weaving, for example. Work under competent instruction on looms that are properly set up, and with colors and textures to satisfy the artistic sense. Work, work, what a blessing it is! The rhythmic beat of the loom, the necessity for careful attention, drive all complications out of the mind for the time being. But the hard thoughts, the depression, the physical and mental suffering, will come back. Usually the day is split up into many short periods of work and rest so that there is not time for consecutive worry and not work

enough to prove utterly exhausting. The patient is urged to neglect her problems and to slip gradually into the condition of a machine that works and rests alternately without conscious thought. She is told that no harm can come from the neglect of her problems; that later, when she is better, they will be more easily solved. Days and days of this, with overfeeding when that is needed, with special medical treatment if that is necessary. After a while the sheer monotony of it becomes a joy, an inexpressible relief. The tired brain and the too busy nerves quiet down and the final stage of progress is reached.

Out under the trees in a hammock the tired patient, who does not try to think, begins to feel the sheer beauty of her surroundings. She could not do this before; but the improvement in her health, the absence of the home strain and a growing belief in recovery finally have their way and she begins to live simply, primitively. That is the key to the situation — effective living in a small and circumscribed

field. It is only a question of time when that field may be enlarged; how much enlarged it is still too early to know.

If religious faith is to be a factor in recovery there must be no officious attempt to supply it. The doctor may not wisely preach, but he will find out sooner or later whether there is need of support and development for such germs of faith as have not perished. The new faith, if it is to make the cure complete, must be one of natural growth. It must grow out of the love of trees and sky, a faith that gradually recognizes the spirit of God in these great evidences of His love. When that recognition is complete, the heart will supply what the brain could not compass, and gradually, perhaps, the faith of childhood will become understandable and real. If this happens there need be little anxiety for the future.

Much may remain to be done along practical lines. The field of activity must be gradually increased until the safe limits are recognized and understood. The patient must be taught,

if she has not already taught herself, that successful living means living within the strength, but that such limitations need not be irksome or really limiting at all. When it has been made clear that a limited life well lived is better than a wider one badly lived, and when the habit of small but successful living has been established, the mission of the sanatorium is accomplished.

XII

THE MEDICINE OF THE SPIRIT

With futile hands we seek to gain
Our inaccessible desire,
Diviner summits to attain,
With faith that sinks and feet that tire;
But nought shall conquer or control
The heavenward hunger of the soul.

The end, elusive and afar,
Still lures us with its beckoning flight,
And all our mortal moments are
A session of the infinite.
How shall we reach the great unknown
Nirvana of thy Lotus-throne?

SAROJINI NAIDU

THE successful doctor is a busy man; too busy. He goes about among his patients spending ten minutes here and a half-hour there, listening to recitals of symptoms, feeling of pulses, looking at tongues, listening to hearts, taking blood pressures, making keen and experienced observations whereby he predicts the course of illness and prescribes to the patient's physical and mental relief. He finishes his day's work, blots out the memory of much that has been

said and done, and goes to bed tired and with a vague dissatisfaction. He is glad that he has prevented the spread of contagion by isolation and insistence on cleanliness, or he may realize that he has saved a life by engineering a timely piece of surgery. Yet there is sure to be in his mind, if he is a thoughtful man, a feeling of superficiality and futility. There comes before him the picture of the patients whom he ought to have helped, not only physically but mentally and spiritually, but with whom he has totally failed. Is it not the physician's business to cure the deep unhappiness of life and to substitute courage for the distress and gloom that accompany the sense of failure? He has been putting patients on their physical feet whenever he could. He has used all the new and better methods of diagnosis and treatment, yet he may have left untouched an immense field of human suffering which is, or might be, within his power to relieve.

Following a natural and useful method of procedure, medicine is attempting to analyze

the human mind in the hope of detecting by precise methods the failures and complications of the mental life. The classified questions and answers, the kindly probing into matters of suppression, into secret feelings and interests and designs, may and often do make possible extraordinary reconstructions and improvements and much-needed relief.

It has become more and more evident to me that medical men must be moralists and teachers if they are to meet successfully some of the most distressing maladies. There are many people who will not go to their clergyman for advice. I am inclined to think that there is a great field of mental illness which lies open to the physician only, and which cannot, as a rule, be handled effectively by any one else. This may be because the disappointed and discouraged patient usually conceives his trouble to be partly or wholly physical, in which case the clergyman would be out of his element; and partly because the patient feels that the clergyman has moral preconceptions

that will surely bias him. When satisfactory moral teachings come from the medical camp, the effect is the more striking because it is in a sense unexpected and because it takes intelligent cognizance of the physical situation. We know we ought not to neglect our bodies. We therefore feel safer when we take our depressions and anxieties to the doctor, who will first go carefully into all the physical conditions and apply the appropriate remedies. Alas, for the nervous patient if the physician goes no further than the bodily symptoms, finds nothing organically wrong, and prescribes a change of air or diversion. It is perhaps worse still if he goes a little further and declares that the nervousness and depression are simply a matter of temperament and may be changed if the patient is only willing. Such a course is fruitful of the most unfortunate misunderstandings and discouragements.

What is success? Who may say that he is successful and not be contradicted? The

accumulation of money, the enjoyment of comparative health, the accomplishment of great and good deeds; all these, in face of the ideal and in the light of our pitiful mortality, seem small enough. My patient, who feels so deeply a sense of failure, is really in no worse plight than any man or woman who looks fairly at the limitations of life. We must come at last to the world-old conclusion that character is the important thing. We must make our patients understand that with all their physical limitations they may have the greatest thing in the world.

We can make them feel that actual accomplishment counts hardly at all in the presence of a spirit which is reborn; that such a spirit will inevitably do its best in the way of material progress, and that we must accept such physical limitations as may not be cured with a resignation which is not darkened by despair. We may go a step further and make it as plain as we can that in some way, beyond our poor words to express, the development

of character is a wholly satisfying experience because it touches upon matters of infinite reach and because it connects in some indefinable way the human personality with the divine personality. When that connection is surely made, failure ceases to exist. The sunlight glows with new brightness, and the little amenities of life which we have so often considered all-important are of real significance only as they minister to our larger growth.

Such medicine as this is too seldom given by the grave and conscientious medical men who go about their daily tasks, serving every need but the final great need, and often enough making people physically better that they may suffer spiritually more. What is there about such advice which need be shunned by the scientific mind? We do not hesitate to use medicines and drugs about which we know comparatively little. The modern serums and vaccines are surely not wholly understood. I believe that the medical adviser will be absolutely lost if he attempts to preach any

doctrine or religion beyond which the scientific mind may reasonably go; but such a mind may go much further than it usually does, still keeping within the bounds of reason and understanding if not of actually proved fact. When it is understood that medical men may wisely preach a new message which is but the old message of the spirit shorn only of sentiment and dogma, there will be a new era for the healing art. The medical teacher will acquire a spiritual power commensurate with his physical accomplishments. He need not usurp the office of the Church, but may easily send his patients to the pews with minds so clarified and prepared that they can understand and use the teachings of the pulpit.

I realize that in placing the life of the spirit above that of the body I am implying a kind of impersonality, a certain freedom from selfishness and self-concern which is beyond everyday experience and which may well seem visionary to men who are fully occupied with material things. I realize the insistence of the

material and the actual. Human love, human sorrow, physical beauty, the appeal of all that is true to line and form, the world of material accomplishment; all these are intensely real and important. Their call is not to be denied, nor is the happiness or the sorrow which they bring unreal. But the more I study people and things, the more convinced I become that we had better make the material world less real, and the spiritual world more real, if we are to live in the largest sense and approach our destiny untrammelled and unafraid. Out of the suggestions of this material world with its infinite charm, out of its loves and enthusiasms, we must construct a spiritual world which is largely impersonal and which is therefore unassailable and indestructible. From that intangible world we call spiritual we may come back to the demands of life with a freshness and a courage which see in material things hardly more than the reflections of a larger life beyond. It is only by a kind of "other-worldliness" that we may hope to give true

values to the material world. Approaching from the impersonal side we are saved something of the poignancy of grief, something of the finality of loss — since these things cannot too deeply hurt the spirit which reaches beyond them. We can bear injustice and every injury since the spiritual mind cannot suffer in the material sense. But we must make more than an approach to the material life; we must live in fullest measure. For it is in the fine, brave way we live the material life that we prove the value and truth of the spiritual.

To be impersonal in the sense I mean is not to lose identity in a kind of refined ether, but rather to rise above material sensations, however absorbing they may be, into an atmosphere where we are freed or partly freed from the deadly insistence and finality of things. So we may enter an interpretive state in which we are freed from our personal relationships and see the world as from a height. From this height we shall inevitably descend to do battle with evil, to meet our own personal responsi-

bilities, to live and love with a warmth and fullness that would not have been possible had we been wholly absorbed in the material — submerged in the actual. Moreover, I believe that because of such withdrawal we may become, do become, more intensely personal in a better sense. It is by emancipation from the tyranny of facts that our interpretation of facts becomes clearer and more individual.

We must not advise our patients to forget nor to forego the comforts and pleasures of life, but rather to have them and live them more fully. We must ask them to go beyond these fine material things into a gracious aloofness which gives new proportions and values, which makes them live more wisely and devotedly, which will make them accept physical limitations with good heart, knowing that loss and sorrow are not final, that they can hardly reach beyond the material world.

Such a conception is not wholly of the imagination — a dream that is pitiful because it offers hopes which cannot be substantiated. I believe

that we may live in such a spirit world and be unassailably happy and well, no matter what may happen to us materially, no matter what losses we may have to meet, or what sad debts we may have to pay, over the counters of reality. I even go so far as to think that those who are most happy and who really triumph over inevitable loss are already living in the spirit world, though they may know it not.

XIII

SYMBOLS

But — a stirring thrills the air
Like to sounds of joyance there
That the rages
Of the ages

Shall be cancelled, and deliverance offered from the darts that
were,

Consciousness the Will informing, till It fashion all things fair!

THOMAS HARDY

THE material world is so big and so beautiful with such an infinity of charm and delight we need not be blamed if at times we consider it final and act accordingly. But we have to be very well and happy to do this. The sea grows dull and the trees droop sadly, the waves of burnished grass in the sunlight soon lose their luster, when illness or disappointment come. Love itself grows cold. The shadow of injustice and wrong darkens the world. However hard we may work to sustain what we call human life, that spark dies down and goes out. There is nothing fixed upon which we can depend, since life itself must finally depart.

There is only one remedy for this sense of mutability. We must create a world above the world, or rather out of it. As a matter of fact, we are continually creating this unseen world, continually preserving for final life the charm and glory of material but changing things. The light upon the mountains, the light upon the sea, have for us a significance far beyond their material aspects. The material world crumbles and disintegrates. But if we really feel the beauty of nature, we shall create for ourselves this upper world where things do not change. Our sorrows and disappointments, our lack of faith, our discouragements, make up, on the other hand, a contrasting world of shadow which I like to feel has its significance and importance by way of contrast, at least. All this is easy enough. We are doing it all the time, laying up for ourselves treasures in heaven.

It makes our material world even more real to think that way about it, to feel that human love, which seems so perfect, is but a poor

shadow of the real thing which is struggling to get through. Certain systems of religion, of course, have it all planned, how we shall pass from this world of material things to the spiritual world, and a very beautiful planning it is, perhaps nearer to the truth than we realize. And yet here, more clearly than in most other fields, we are dealing with symbols.

As a young surgeon I used at times to have charge of the accident room in one of the great metropolitan hospitals. Here were brought a long, sad train of accidents; many of the gravest sort. Most of the patients, of course, were working-men. They came from the railroads and the docks and they were almost all of them Roman Catholics in their religion. It was our custom, whenever a serious accident was brought in, to send for a priest who lived near by. I have often been privileged to stay with the patient through the final ministrations of the Church. Many times I have seen men groaning in agony grow quiet and smile with a kind of peace, which was then beyond

my understanding, when the little priest appeared and held up his hand. I know now that by the symbol of the cross he opened a door into the upper world where things are permanent, into the world which is bright with all the brightness and beauty of this world, but which does not fade, because it is of the spirit.

Whatever kind of religion we may profess or deny, such great things happen to us if we will let the material experiences of life assume their real value, their greatest value, which is symbolic. Much of this symbolism comes to us unconsciously or in spite of skepticism. It is, after all, the thing which makes life really interesting. The engineer who overcomes tremendous odds, who builds his bridge where less daring minds said it could not go, accomplishes a great deal more for himself and for the world than the literal spanning of the stream, and his bridge is important for more purposes than the passage of traffic. It is symbolic of something higher and finer than itself toward which

men are constantly striving and constantly attaining in part. Beautiful as is the world of material things, it is the unattained, the half-glimpsed charm that gives zest to life, which gives to material things a value far beyond our appraisal. I suppose it is this partly appreciated value that keeps us going and sends us over at last with good courage into the unseen world.

People of the present day, active, busy people who have little time for thinking, seem to reach discouragement and unhappiness by two principal routes: they either fail in their accomplishments, or else, having attained their object, find it inadequate and poor. Sometimes it seems as though real happiness could be found only by indifference and thoughtlessness which will not recognize defeat and which simply refuse to consider the final defeat of death.

We may well ask these people to accept some form of religious belief which will animate their lives and give them hope and courage

in a difficult world. But very many will not, cannot become religious in the usual sense. It is usually the mind which is capable of understanding and using symbolism that can find in any religious conception the relief and comfort which it needs. For this reason I plead for symbolism in the common affairs of life and in the common objects of life. Once we begin to see a significance beyond the actual, once we discern in the beauty of a tree or hillside something beyond the thing itself, indefinable, illusive, yet infinitely precious and fine, we have begun to be religious in a very real sense. We may not be able to accept one doctrine or another, or any complete system of salvation; but we shall be opening our minds to the perception of the surrounding world of spirit which interprets and glorifies the material world and which may easily, without becoming illogical, make almost any religious concept available for our use. There are plenty of men, good men, too, who might become deeply and consistently religious in the accept-

ance of some form of belief if they could approach from the side of logic, observation, and simple feeling.

I feel the greater interest in encouraging this method of approach among my patients because it has been my own method and has brought me to a point of appreciation which makes my religious life a very vital and compelling thing. The time came with me, as I suppose it does with half the world, when I could no longer accept the teachings of my childhood with any kind of comfort or complaisance. I simply did not believe it. The story of the Christ and the scheme of salvation meant little to me because I had developed what I supposed was a logical mind and was dealing with facts. Yet there was always in the back of my mind a deep longing for some satisfying belief and a terrible sense of finality in which the idea of death loomed large.

I did not acquire a religious belief out of hand, I did not say I believe this or I believe

that. I could not and be true to what I considered logic and consistency. I got my religion by gazing long and earnestly at the sea and the sky, and at all beautiful things that came before me; by looking with open mind and heart into the world of nature, into the deep woods, and into the streams; by listening with rapt spirit to the best of music; by coming close to the more complex world of joy and suffering in the world of men. This beautiful world was utterly inexplicable, impossible, unless it should be symbolic of some greater life and some greater beauty beyond. I gazed at the blue and white of the sea in the sunlight and in the drifting mist until I felt the presence of God. Then I could understand the God of the Bible, the God of the Old Testament, and the beautiful symbolism of the Christ in the New. I lost once and for all the feeling of loneliness and despair that had been so terribly a part of life before. I found in symbols a sense of greater life and understanding beyond the realm of the senses. It became possible for me

to worship and to trust a God I could neither see, nor hear, nor imagine. There can be no greater relief for tired nerves, for the weariness of mental suffering, than just such a conversion.

XIV

SLEEP

Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes
May weep but never see,
A night of memories and sighs
I consecrate to thee.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR

And men grew afraid of sleep in Allathurion. And they grew worn and pale; some through the want of rest, and others from fear of the things they saw on the cindery plains of Hell.

LORD DUNSANY

HOWEVER busy and restless the days may be, however driven and tormented the hours of labor, the night for most of us is a time of quiet, a time dedicated to restoration of body and mind. It is a pity we do not always use the night for this great purpose. How many tired and distracted people carry to their beds the "cares that infest the day"! How many nights that should be calm and serene are torn and distressed!

Sometimes in the stress of life we may not hope for sleep. Some great anxiety, some

great loss, pain, or sorrow, preclude sleep and we must lie awake with our unhappy meditations.

All medical men are besieged by patients who beg for something to make them sleep; and all medical men who are wise are very cautious, very loath, to dispense the care-dispelling drugs which excuse our faulty living and give us sleep. For they know that except where there is some great and special need it is wrong, or positively harmful, to induce sleep by artificial means. I think I may say truthfully that with rare exceptions sleep will come to "bless the tired eyes" if we live our days consistently and wisely; if we do not abuse the privilege of life.

I find that many of those whom I am tempted to drug to sleep are out of tune with life; are so restless and turbulent, or so depressed and unhappy, that sleep is impossible. I am not thinking now of physical pain, that is another matter; but of the mental and spiritual suffering which comes from maladjust-

ment, from rebellion at the deep unhappiness which is too often our human lot.

The sleepless patient must, first of all, be studied physically. We must find, and correct if we can, any cause of physical restlessness or pain. We must correct bad physical habits so that the night may be approached with the best possible bodily conditions; then we must attempt the more subtle readjustments of mind and spirit.

It is easy enough to say to the overworked and sleepless business man, "You must leave your cares behind you when you go home." But how can he when they are so insistent; when fortune or wreck wait upon his judgment; when the worry and uncertainty of business call insistently for twenty-four hours of thought and judgment? You may even make him see that his judgment will be better if he gives up to relaxation and diversion for a little while. He can rarely follow your advice unless he acquires a superiority, a grasp, which is greater than business.

There must be background and justification in life if there is to be tranquillity and peace. The tired men of affairs or the weary and distracted society women must get behind the details of life — must see life whole and not in restless parts — if they are to find restoration in sleep. We are so much absorbed with the material that we get quite out of touch with the great serenity which surrounds us and of which we were meant to be a part. We put the affairs of life first and they overcome us. We forget that life and work, at their best, are but the expression of something deeper and finer. If we could only get the proportion right, if we could work for something besides money and power, there would be less question of sleep.

How many of us are aware of the night; how many of us look out of our windows at the moonlight and the trees with a sense of their beauty, an appreciation which is worship? How many of us feel, behind the loveliness that thrills us, the staying, supporting spirit

of God — of a God so great and so wise that we may safely leave in His hands all the issues of life? Ah, if we only could feel that faith there would be fewer sleepless nights.

We sleep and dream, and the night is hideous with phantoms and terrors. It is almost better to lie awake. There are theories about dreams — ingenious explanations. They express the hidden desires and wishes — well — perhaps. I do not believe much in that, but I know that if we treat our bodies well, if we do not strain and tax our minds with needless worries, if our lives are clean and good, if they are surrounded and inspired by something deeper than life, we may dream, but the dreams will not hurt us.

It seems that the mind is what we call suggestible. We all know that the thoughts we take to bed with us are very apt to recur in the morning or in wakeful hours. Most of us have had the experience of waking as though roused by an alarm clock at some hour we had chosen for the beginning of a journey. If it is so,

that the sleeping mind is sensitive to suggestion, that it is enriched or wearied by unconscious thinking, what a field for education and development is here. The poet or the musician awakens in the night to find he has elaborated some new and beautiful idea. We may not all do this, but we are badly off if we cannot go to sleep with some large and inspiring thought, some tender or loving feeling which shall live on through the hours of sleep, making us finer, better men and women, more and more sensitive to the beauty and significance of life. I know of nothing more charming in literature than the dream trysts of Peter Ibbetson. True or not, they are symbolic of what may happen in sleep to enrich and develop our lives, and which may save them from the dreariness and unhappiness that must so often persist for years.

“Oh, now you are dreaming true. It’s quite easy — my father taught me. You have only to sleep with your feet crossed and your hands behind your head. You must never leave off

thinking where you want to be in your dreams, and when you fall asleep you will get there.”

But those who lie awake must not wish too much for sleep. Sleep will always elude us if we seek too ardently. The wearying devices which are recommended will usually fail to produce sleep, and the man who reads until dawn or who looks anxiously at his watch every hour is sure to suffer more than one who takes the night as it comes. If there is no actual pain it should be possible to lie awake successfully, which is almost as good as sleep.

I do not believe that the mind need always be active. It is quite possible to lie for hours almost unthinking and so virtually sleeping. If life has become bearable, if the tired mind at last understands why it is living — that some great purpose underlies the complexities and distractions of the day; a purpose which reaches back, far back beyond our sight and understanding, into the heart and life of God; if we can feel that our living is not in vain, that our successes, our failures, our happiness, and

our sorrow, are all known and understood in some way far beyond our ken, there will be no fear of the night, but only a great understanding which makes it almost a matter of indifference whether we wake or sleep.

THE END

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